



Winter view of Kenardington Church, Kent courtesy of English Rural resident Stacey Olymbios

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

HELLO AND WELCOME to the Winter edition of the Bulletin. The evenings have drawn in and the days are getting shorter. The cold weather is coming and Christmas will be upon us very soon. In this edition there are tips to help ensure that your property is ready for the cold weather, alongside helpful hints for a stress free festive period. You will also find inserted into this edition, a leaflet containing information about the countrywide rollout of electricity smart meters and how to get one.



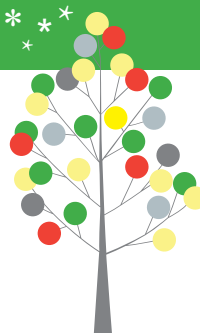
I would like to ask you all again to remember that this newsletter is produced for you. So if you have any recipes, hints or tips, from gardening to DIY, then please email me on: melanie.olymbios@englishrural.org.uk

CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS * * * * *

The Office will close at 12:30pm on Friday 23rd December and will reopen at 9am on Tuesday 3rd January.

Should you have an emergency during that time, please call the out of hours telephone line on:

0808 168 6246



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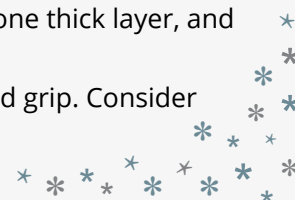
STAY WELL THIS WINTER

Public Health England has started a campaign to help people stay well this winter. The campaign's main aim is to try and reduce the burden on frontline NHS services, therefore reducing the need for admissions to hospital.

So what can you do to try and help yourself?

- At the first sign of a winter illness, visit your local pharmacist. Illnesses such as the common cold are viruses and cannot be treated with antibiotics. A pharmacist will be able to help you purchase over the counter medication to help alleviate the symptoms. However, common sense must be used. If you are feeling very unwell, then you need to seek the advice of your GP or call NHS Direct on 111.
- If you are aged 65 or over, have a chronic or long term health condition, are a carer, have children aged between 2 and 5 or are pregnant, then you are eligible to have a free flu jab. Many pharmacies also offer the flu jab for a small cost for people that do not fall into any of these categories.
- Be aware - The cold and damp weather – ice, snow and cold winds – can be bad for your health, especially if you're in one of the categories above. It can make you more vulnerable to winter illnesses, such as coughs and colds, which could become very serious. It also increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks and stroke. Ensure that you stay warm and safe. Wearing several thin layers can keep you much warmer than one thick layer, and ensure that your house is heated to a minimum of 18 degrees Celsius.
- When venturing out in ice and snow, ensure that you have appropriate footwear with a good grip. Consider purchasing ice grips that clip onto the bottom of your shoes.

For more information on this campaign visit <https://www.nhs.uk/staywell>



GETTING TO KNOW...

This is a new feature that will run in every issue of The Bulletin, to help you get to know each member of English Rural Staff. Each person will be asked the same ten questions to help you get to know them a little better

Introducing Janette Spence...

Repairs and
Maintenance Officer



1. In 10 words sum up your role at English Rural

Busy, interesting, rewarding, challenging, demanding, responsible, satisfying, stressful, proactive, creative.

2. What part of the job do you like best?

Meeting with new residents and showing them around the new build properties which will become their homes. It's rewarding to see how much it means to them to have a home in a village they have a strong connection with.

3. What part of the job do you dislike?

Having to apply rechargeable cost to residents and dealing with aggressive and negative behaviour.

4. If you had an extra day at work each week, what would you do?

I don't think that an extra day would be enough, I would always want another extra day.

5. Tell us something interesting about you that people won't know.

I used to take part in church bell ringing for weddings and services.

6. What did you do before you came to English Rural?

I worked for a gas installation and maintenance company as a Contracts Administrator and prior to that a Senior Medical Underwriter for a large insurance company.

7. Do you have any hobbies?

I love banger racing (cars) and have taken part in ladies races. Most weekends you will find me at the racing track acting as mechanic for my husband, Steve who races too. I also sign write all of his cars. I am part of a ladies dart team playing weekly matches for the local league.

8. What does your perfect day look like?

A perfect day for me is to be beside the sea come rain or shine. I will often take myself to the sea as there is nothing more calming and relaxing as being beside the sea and finishing the day off with fish and chips on the beach.

9. Do you have any pets?

Two cats – Chucky who is a ginger moggie and Bertie a black moggie.

10. What has been your biggest accomplishment to date?

Raising my three sons to be the people they are today and achieving their own dreams. Having two wonderful granddaughters.

And for Janette there are some unexpected challenges that her days work provides, as she recently found out on a trip to the New Forest when her route was blocked by donkeys.....



INTERESTING HOBBIES

Mr Atkins, a resident of New Forest Villages Housing Association, is a keen model maker.

Using matchsticks he had made a variety of models, dolls toys and dolls house furniture for Mrs Atkins' Dolls House. The detail and time taken shows great skill and the variety of items he has painstakingly made is impressive!

He also collects antique bottles from around the area and has an in depth knowledge of their history.



Mr Harding a New Forest Villages Housing Association resident acts as an inspiration for us all, he has skilfully made two impressive bin stores for his household and his neighbours to store rubbish bags which are waiting for collection.

Every detail has been thought of in the making including hooks on the lids to make life easier for the refuse collectors. Using the bin stores will prevent vermin from attacking the refuse, keep the area tidy and discourage vermin and pests.



Do you have an interesting hobby? Get in touch if you do!

PETS CORNER



ARE YOUR PETS WINTER READY? It isn't just us that feel the effects of the cold weather, and to try to avoid winter related problems with your pets, The Blue Cross has issued the following advice for pet owners:

DOGS: While dogs wear fur coats all year-round, most pet dogs aren't used to the extreme cold so could develop hypothermia or frostbite if left outside unattended. Breeds that don't have much fur, such as greyhounds and Chihuahuas, do feel the cold. Investing in a cosy canine jumper or coat will help them to cope with low temperatures. Ice, snow and cold road surfaces can make paws poorly. If your pet starts lifting up their paws, whining or stopping on walks it could be that their feet are cold. Boots will help keep paws safe. Trim the hair around your dog's feet to help prevent ice balls – these form between the pads and toes and are really painful.

Give your dog's paws a wash after walking on salted pavements as salt and grit can irritate their footpads. If your dog doesn't get as much exercise during the winter months don't forget to cut back a bit on what you feed them.

Don't share your Christmas dinner with your dog. Turkey bones are choking hazards and raisins (found in Christmas cake and pudding) are toxic.

SMALL PETS: Place hutches in a sheltered area and position them so that rain, sleet or snow can't blow in. consider moving hutches to a shed or unused garage if the weather is really bad. Guinea pigs can suffer badly in chilly temperatures so bring them inside if you can. If your pet needs to stay outside, keep them snug by placing blankets over the front of their hutch and give them extra bedding

Check water regularly because the little ball inside the bottle freezes easily, which means your pet won't be able to drink. You pet will still need to exercise during the day so make sure they have access to their run or a safe place inside to exercise. Cold pets need extra calories to keep warm so give them lots of extra good quality hay.

STRESS-FREE CHRISTMAS

Love it or hate it, Christmas time is almost upon us again. However, with careful planning, a lot of the major anxieties associated with this time of year can be avoided.

The biggest stress usually associated with Christmas is money. With the shops strewn with gifts and food, it is easy to overspend. Set a budget, and ensure that you stick to it. Ensure that all bills are paid first. Never be tempted to think I will miss the rent payment this month and use that for Christmas presents. Having to pay double rent the next month, or any other bill, can be a financial nightmare. Incidences of rent arrears always spike at Christmas, and it uses valuable resources to chase these missing payments in the New Year.

It's too late for this year, but consider buying Christmas presents throughout the year for next Christmas. This not only reduces the stress of last minute shopping, it spreads the cost evenly throughout the year.

Make shopping lists and stick to them, it's very easy to overspend without one. Consider shopping for both gifts and groceries online. You will be able to find the best deals and won't be tempted to buy unnecessary things just because you have seen them. It's also a fantastic way to avoid the Christmas shopping crowds.

Write your cards and wrap your presents early. Not only does this help with any last minute rush, once a present is wrapped and ready, you won't be so tempted to keep adding more to it, therefore saving yourself money.

Prepare as much of Christmas food before the big day. Many things can be made and frozen, so that all you have to do is defrost and cook.

Most of all, enjoy your day!

CATS: Most cats like to snuggle up inside during the winter months but if yours is a year-round explorer make sure they do have access to somewhere warm. If it's really cold, keep your cat indoors – even if they are seriously unimpressed. Cats can develop hypothermia and frostbite in the extreme cold.

Be aware of where your cat likes to sit and hide. Cold cats have been known to climb inside warm car engines and are then seriously hurt or killed when the engine is switched on. They might also hide and become trapped in places like sheds and garages. If in doubt, keep your cat inside.

Cats that usually go to the toilet outside may need a litter tray inside during winter, especially if there is snow on the ground. Make sure your cat flap is accessible during heavy snow fall.

Some Christmas gifts including plants poinsettia and lilies are poisonous to cats.



HOME SWAPPER

Mutual Exchange

From time-to-time English Rural gets enquiries from residents interested in exchanging their home with another housing association tenant.

Restrictions apply to English Rural homes, so any potential swap partners will need to have a the qualifying local connection. English Rural is though keen to help support tenants interested in a mutual exchange and has a detailed policy covering this published on its website or available on request. To help support tenants search, English Rural will also cover the cost of tenants signing up to the services of Homeswapper, which is a national database where you can look for a potential exchange partner.

To find out more about this, contact your dedicated Regional Housing Manager.

AGM NEWS



Pictured are Peter Couchman Chief Executive of the Plunkett Foundation (right) and President of English Rural Sir Peter Dixon (left).

The AGM took place on Tuesday 20th September 2016 in Damerham Village Hall in Damerham, located on the edge of the New Forest.

Around 60 guests attended and Peter Couchman, Chief Executive of the Plunkett Foundation was the guest speaker. He gave a presentation on the role of the Plunkett Foundation advising the audience how they help people predominantly in rural areas. The Plunkett Foundation supports people to set up and run life changing community cooperatives that help them tackle issues ranging from loneliness and isolation to poverty.

More information on the Foundation can be found at <https://www.plunkett.co.uk/>

WELFARE

Attendance Allowance – People over 65 with Care Needs

As we get older, many of us need a little extra help to look after ourselves, especially if we have a long-term illness or disability. You may be able to claim Attendance Allowance if your ability to keep safe or look after your own personal care is affected by physical or mental illness or disability.

Attendance Allowance is money for people aged 65 or over who have care needs. It could include help outside the home. It does not matter if no one actually gives this help, as long as you can show you need it. Attendance Allowance does not cover mobility needs.

To claim Attendance Allowance you must have needed help with your care needs for at least 6 months. (If you're terminally ill you can make a claim straight away.) It is not means-tested so your income and savings are not taken into account when assessing if you qualify for the benefit. Contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau, the department of Work and Pensions or follow the links below for more information. Information referenced from the Department of Work and Pensions, Age Concern, Turn2Us and Carers UK websites.

- www.gov.uk/attendance-allowance/overview
- <http://www.ageuk.org.uk>
- <https://www.turn2us.org.uk>
- <http://www.carersuk.org>

WINTER ENERGY SAVING TIPS

Simple measures you can take today to help you save energy and money.

- Turning your thermostat down by 1°C could cut your heating bills by up to 10%. Check that thermostatic radiator valves are set appropriately for the occupancy of the room.
- Is your water too hot? Your cylinder thermostat shouldn't need to be set higher than 60°C/140°F.
- Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows and always turn off the lights when you leave a room.
- Don't leave appliances on standby and remember not to leave appliances on charge unnecessarily.
- If you're not filling up the washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher; use the half-load or economy programme.
- Only boil as much water as you need (but cover the element if you're using an electric kettle).
- Replace your light bulbs with energy saving ones: just one can reduce your lighting costs - and they last up to 12 times longer than ordinary light bulbs.
- Purchase "A-rated" domestic appliances when replacements are needed.
- If there is a power failure, check your programmer has not lost the pre-sets or that the clock function has changed.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY @ XMAS



The festive season brings additional dangers due to an increase in the number of electrical appliances being used. Here are some examples:

- Check Christmas lights conform to British Safety Standards. Remember fairy lights heat up and should be kept away from anything that will burn. Lights intended for internal use should not be used outside. Never leave Christmas lights on when you go out.
- Don't overload electrical sockets and be especially careful with Christmas lights.
- Never leave burning candles unattended or better still avoid using them.
- Avoid putting on washing machines, tumble driers or dishwashers when you leave the house or go to bed. Be especially careful with chargers for mobile phones or laptops.
- Most fires start in the kitchen – never leave a cooker unattended.
- Test your smoke alarm and ensure it is working properly. Use the test facility to check it regularly.
- Make sure you and your family know what to do in an emergency – prepare a fire escape plan.

MAINTENANCE UPDATE



The maintenance team have asked that the following reminders are given:

- With the winter weather approaching, vermin such as rats are looking for warm places to hide. Ensure that gardens are kept clear of rubbish and that if feeding the birds, the area is kept clean to discourage unwanted visitors.
- Fencing: English Rural are responsible for two privacy panels adjacent to the property, and chain link fence they have fitted, they will not carry out repairs to panelled fences erected by residents themselves or the previous occupant.
- Almost all sewage pumping stations have now been adopted by the local water authority, under new government legislation. Residents impacted by this process have been contacted with details of who to contact should a fault occur in the future. This applies to most sewage pumping stations only and NOT treatment plants.
- The out of hours service will often only carry out works to make safe the resident and property. Despite the best efforts of some households, this service can not to be used to accommodate personal or working commitments which must be carried out in normal working hours. Often, the engineers will attend and isolate appliances/systems until English Rural can allocate the work to preferred contractors the next working day. If a repair is possible, this will be carried out, however more often than not, parts are required, and this will need to be referred to our own contractors to deal with. Unnecessary callouts to this service which is not deemed an emergency repair, and can be dealt with the next working day, can be subject to a recharge to the tenant. No heating and hot water is not deemed an emergency if the next day is a working day.

ARE YOU READY FOR WINTER?

There are many things that can be done to ensure that your property is ready for winter. Frozen and burst pipes are a big issue in the winter months and can be easily avoided. Ensure that you heat your home appropriately for the weather, as this can reduce the risk of pipes freezing and bursting. Even if you are going away, ensure that the heating is left on at a low level.

If you have fitted an outside tap, ensure that you either drain it and turn off its water supply, or make sure that the pipes are well lagged. This will stop the pipe from freezing or bursting.

Check guttering is in good order and that over flow pipes are not leaking. Report to the maintenance team if repairs are needed.

If high winds are forecast, ensure that everything in the garden is secure.

Make sure you have adequate ventilation to try and prevent condensation and mould. Don't dry washing indoors as this increases moisture. Use the extractor fans when cooking, bathing or showering to remove the steam, and vent tumble driers as per the manufacturer's instructions.

Ensure that you have adequate insurance. English Rural insures the building, but taking out household contents insurance is also highly recommended. In the event of damage to your personal possessions due to flooding or weather damage, then you can rest in the knowledge that you will be able to replace them. Over recent years on almost every occasion where fire and flood have caused damage to homes and resulted in damage to tenants' own belongings, tenants have not held contents insurance, leaving them facing significant losses which they can not easily afford; don't be one of these households that gets caught out!



GEORGE CHRISTMAS MICROWAVE FUDGE

- 400g golden caster sugar
- 397g can condensed milk
- 140g salted butter, chopped into pieces
- 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
- 2 tbsp coffee liqueur
(or another alcohol of your choice - amaretto or brandy works well)

FERRERO ROCHER CHOCOLATE BROWNIES

- box of 16 Ferrero Rocher chocolates
- 250g pack salted butter, plus extra for greasing
- 250g golden caster sugar
- 225g light muscovado sugar
- 100g cocoa powder
- 4 large eggs
- 100g self-raising flour
- 85g ready-chopped hazelnuts
- 4 tbsp Frangelico
(or Fratello hazelnut liqueur or Disaronno)
- a 21-22cm square tin

1. Grease and line a 20cm square baking tin with baking parchment. Put the sugar, condensed milk and butter in a large heatproof bowl (the mixture will bubble up as it cooks to roughly double its size), add a good pinch of salt and stir together.
2. Heat the mixture in the microwave on High for 10 mins, stirring every 2-3 mins. Keep an eye on the mixture, as it will bubble up and

1. Unwrap the chocolates, place on a tray and pop in the freezer. Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Lightly grease and line the base and sides of the tin with baking parchment
2. Put the butter, sugars and cocoa into your largest saucepan and gently melt together, stirring regularly so the mixture doesn't catch. Once the sugar granules have just about disappeared, take off the heat, tip into a bowl and leave to cool for 5 mins.
3. Use a whisk or wooden spoon to beat the eggs, one by one, into the mixture. When they're completely incorporated and the mixture is

- may go over the sides of the bowl.
3. Add the vanilla and liqueur to the mixture, whisk together and heat on High for another 2 mins. The mixture should be caramel-coloured and thickened.
4. Scrape into the tin and set aside for 45 mins-1 hr until cool and firm before cutting. Pack into a box and eat within 3 weeks.

smooth and shiny, stir in the flour, hazelnuts and liqueur. Tip the mixture into the prepared tin and bake for 35 mins.

4. Remove the tin from the oven and use a cutlery knife to mark the top of the brownies into 16 squares (don't cut through, it's just as a guide). Use a teaspoon to push a little dent in the centre of each portion and add a frozen Ferrero Rocher chocolate into each dip. Return to the oven for 3 mins, then remove and leave to cool completely.
5. Once cool, cut into 16 squares. Will keep for 3 days in an airtight container.

WHAT'S NEW @ HQ



Rent will go down by 1% again this April, as part of a four year rent reduction. You will receive a letter in March 2017 with next year's new amounts payable.

No firm details have been announced about the **Voluntary Right to Buy (VRtB)** scheme, as the Government continues to focus on Brexit arrangements. Their Autumn Statement outlined that further regional pilots will be held in 2017 before a wider national roll out. We will keep residents informed as soon as we know which regions these are. Our board has made principle policy decisions around how we will work with VRtB, which essentially confirm the position that we will not sell rural homes, but we will advise and assist eligible tenants to purchase a property from another housing association so far as these are available. A full policy will be published once all details become clear.

English Rural is continuing to work closely with the New Forest Villages Housing Association and the agreement to support the delivery of services has been extended for a further two years. Finally, this Spring we will welcome Kathryn Harrison back to work, following her maternity leave.

FUND TO KEEP RURAL COMMUNITIES WARM

A £42,000 fund to help keep vulnerable people within rural communities warm this winter has been approved in Hampshire. The funding was approved by the Council Leader, as part of wider ranging funding from the Councils Rural Delivery Strategy. The funding is of vital importance to ensure that vulnerable residents that don't have central heating, particularly those in rural areas, will have the opportunity to install it. Cold kills and being able to keep warm is vital.

<http://rsnonline.org.uk/services/fund-to-keep-rural-communities-warm>

CONTACT US



info@englishrural.org.uk

www.englishrural.org.uk

REPAIRS LINE

Tenants should report repairs and required property maintenance on the number below:

0800 121 4422

(9am to 5pm Mon - Fri)

In case of emergencies:

01772 757 874

(out of hours)

OFFICE

Accounts, lettings, sales, rents, standing orders, permissions and other general enquiries:

English Rural Housing Association

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Coniers Way
New Inn Lane
Burpham
Guildford
Surrey
GU4 7HL

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HOUSING MANAGERS

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